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The role of school activities in training /development of the professional skills specific for the teaching profession

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Abstract

The present study aims to analyze the role of teaching and research activities in developing professional skills of preschool and primary education students (license cycle). For this, the study aims to identify students' perceptions about the role of school activities in professional skills training. In this respect, the study examines some educational variables determinative for the training and development of professional skills, namely teaching contents analyzed as subjects in the curriculum, teaching practice, research activities in which students are involved, specific educational activities (student scientific sessions, school competitions, organizing the activity with students of primary and preschool etc.).

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1. Introduction

The media and informational revolution faces the Romanian educational system with a choice of longterm effects: are teachers really capable to anticipate the dynamics of changes in the society or do they stick to the old patterns? In this latter case they would contradict the reason to prepare students for an optimal social insertion. Are teachers prepared indeed, from the pedagogical competences standpoint, to confront with updated requests?

The analysis of the results obtained, of the participants' opinions has raised problems such as: how do we

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identify the educational intervention alternative in atypical circumstances? Why? When? Where?

The finalities of studying pedagogical subjects at preschool and primary pedagogy specialization targets training and developing a positive attitude towards the teaching profession and also towards teaching activities at the preschool and primary education.

The teacher training for preschool and primary education involves the training and development of a system of professional competences, as well as transversal competences that will help future specialists to obtain optimum performances in the teaching profession.

In the specialized literature are used various criteria and classification models for teaching profession specific skills, being highlighted various skills inventory for each component of the teaching process (in relation with the contents of teaching, with the organization of student activities, with the evaluation etc.).

In the context of changes occurring in social life, especially the globalization and informatization phenomena, as well as following the new regulations regarding the university training standards for teachers in pre-school/primary levels, the need for professional development of schoolteachers and educators has been developed.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. *The professional competences/ the transversal competences*

From a macro perspective, relative to a reference professional situation or a social one, the skill is a set of potential behaviors (affective, cognitive and psychomotor) allowing to the individual effective exercise of some complex activities.

The competence is the proven ability to select, combine and use appropriate knowledge, skills and other acquisitions consisting of values and attitudes for successful resolution of certain categories of work or learning situations, and for personal or professional development in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Potolea, Toma, 2010).

In defining the concept of teaching competence it is noted that it should be put in relation with the first objective social side, on the one hand, given the nature and complexity of tasks that make up the content of the various spheres of social activity and the different functions and subjective-psychological plane which is resultant of knowledge, skills, abilities and temperamental traits characteristic which the individual has, in order to fulfill the social function that he is invested with. (Marcus, 1999).

Thus, the competence means "the ability to behave in a particular, in a social situation, in order to empirically prove effective, approved operating environment" (Rosencrantz, Biddler, 1964, in Marcus, 1999).

It is noted that such a direct relationship between the concept of competence and proficiency, competence with a much wider sphere, referring to the results of the activity, and, in addition to the knowledge and ability to perform a task well, right." (Gherghinescu, 1999, in Marcus, 1999).

In the cognitive vision, one competence involves three dimensions simultaneously juxtaposed and merging into a whole that ensures performance: declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and attitudes (Raynal, 1997).

The professional competences considered as a result of professional experience depends on the skills and capabilities, occurring while working in employment. The skill it is all cognitive, affective, motivational traits which together with the personality traits gives teacher teaching skills required to perform a task that meets its objectives and has very good results (Gliga, 2002).

Transversal competences are skills that are reflected in socio-relational spectrums, with a general character (Dictionnaire de la formation et du développement personnel, 1996).

In speciality literature, identified another categories of competences (Iucu, 2000):

- scientific competence (selected, verified and updated scientific information, capacity to convey knowledge, intelligence, wisdom, flexible educational experience, competence, creative capacities, transfer and application capacity).
- psycho-social competence (ability to establish the appropriate relation with the student, capacity of an efficient communication with the student/group).
- managerial competence (the ability of making information and understanding accessible to students, empathy, work creativity, ability and attitude for stimulating interest, pedagogical tact).

2.2. The competence profile of the primary and pre-school educator

The competence profile of the primary and pre-school educator are these categories of competence:

- psycho-pedagogical and didactic-methodological competences (acknowledgement and explanation of the specific contents and scientific language of the study fields for pre-school and primary school, of theories, models, concept on education, of the evolution of theories, models, conceptions on the psychical life and psychical development of the child, of the educational processes and relations between cognitive-operational and behavioral-axiological structures involved in the learning activity, of social and individual significances of education, of some educational strategies of valorizing the contents of study fields, in order to achieve the tasks of intellectual, moral, professional education, of professional roles and responsibilities of teachers in pre-school and primary school)
- operational – functional competences:
 - o teaching-methodological competencies (achieving teaching project design on different levels – field of study, learning unit, lesson; organization, development and evaluation of pre-school and primary school teaching activities; analysis and critical-constructive self-analysis of the teaching activity);
 - o competences of counseling students/children and their families (elaboration and employment of tools to identify the students' learning capacity, needs, tendencies, abilities and personality traits);
 - o psychosocial and management competences (creation and development of skills, abilities to optimally relate to the group of students and with each student at turn, to guide him/her in order to develop one's internal resources; adjustment and exercise of leading styles and efficiently running strategies for the teaching act and students' class, in different context within school and outside school; elaboration of educational partnerships by collaboration with the other educational factors (family, church, community etc.);
 - o communication competences (project designing, leading and achievement of the instructive-educational process as a communication act; employment and valorization of efficient communication styles and strategies with the students and educational factors);
 - o technical and ITC competences (employment of computer and informational software in the instructive-educational process);
 - o professional (personal) development competences (participation in continuous training forms;
 - o development of an innovative attitude towards teaching, by elaboration and implementation of research projects, valorization of personal qualities and entering of professional principles).

2.2. Pedagogical skill

Concept-based teacher training on the basis of skills penetrated in practical teaching by developing the professionals skills appropriate for the teaching profession. The teaching skill is given by the ability to apply certain principles, by the behavior that should be a model, and by the favorite strategies in teaching activity (Neacsu, 1990).

After Ioan Neacsu, this includes:

- organizing and structuring skills (classroom organization, structuring content, work organization, etc.);
- communication distribution skills (front solicitation or interactive response request for the students);
- resolution and evaluative skills (directing practical work, students cognitive etc.);
- formative potential manifestation skills (stimulate the direct expression of critical opinion behaviors etc.);
- skills that refers on socio-emotional climate (types of influences of the teacher within the student personality);
- skills to stimulate creativity (creative stimulation of student behavior).

The pedagogical skill is "a set of cognitive, affective, motivational and management capacities which interact with personality traits of the teacher, giving him the qualities necessary for a teaching benefits designed to ensure the achievement of the objectives by the vast majority of students and the obtained performances to lie close to the maximum level of intellectual potential of each student" (Jinga, Istrate, 1998).

The same author (Gliga, 2002) defines pedagogical competence in a broad sense, as "the teacher's ability to rule on a pedagogical problems on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the laws and the determinations of the educational phenomena; in the narrow sense, it refers to a person's ability to perform at a certain level of performance, all typical work tasks specific for the teaching profession."

Philippe Perrenoud highlighted in a large study (Perrenoud, 2004) the 10 priority areas of professional skill in the training of teachers detailing specific skills for each competency reference organizing and animating learning situations; management of academic progress; design and improvement of differentiation devices; involve students in learning and applying teamwork; participation in school management; inform and involve parents; use of new technologies; involvement of professional duties and ethical dilemmas; managing their CVT.

From the perspective of the romanian authors, pedagogical competence shall contain the following components: ability to meet students and take into account their age and individual particularities in the design and implementation of the educational activities, the ability to easily communicate with students, to influence and motivate the learning activity, in general, and for learning a subject of study, in particular; the ability to achieve optimal design and the educational activities (specify teaching objectives, the selection of essential content, developing appropriate forms, models and assessment tools, etc.) ability to objectively evaluate training programs and activities, preparing students and chances to succeed, the ability to prepare students for self-training and self-education. (Jinga, Istrate, 1998)

The skills system for the teaching career consist in, according to Romanian teachers (Potolea and Toma, 2010), the three major categories of skills: specialized skills, professional skills (teaching design, management and monitoring of the learning process, evaluation of educational activities, the use of digital technologies, knowledge, advice and differential treatment of students, classroom management), transversal skills (school and institutional development, school-community partnership, career management and personal development, applied educational research).

2.3. Focus on skills in the teaching profession

By deepening the problem of academic qualifications was reached at a time, at them with various types of behaviors, relevant to each one of these. In this respect, the biggest challenge to universities was to identify the most significant behaviors that, once acquired, help someone to practice in a particular area with maximum efficiency.

In the university curricula of professional conduct in question are given in terms of skills and all these behaviors are subscribed to a professional profile called competence profile. Competency profiles developed for each program of study leading to a much better organization of educational process for the following reasons: helps expectations for the results of the study programs to be clearer, more explicit; guide/ guides training process in a predictable direction; become an observable indicator (sometimes measurable) on learning outcomes; generates a set of benchmarks for examinations held at the completion of these programs, so that program providers (universities) and beneficiaries (students) to know whether the expected results were obtained; provides criteria used to evaluate institutional and estimating the efficiency of the investment was used in the more professional education.

3. Design of Research

3.1. The Purpose, objectives and hypothesis of study

The purpose of this study is to identify the perception of students at PIPP specialization - regarding to analyze the role of teaching and research activities in developing professional skills of preschool and primary education.

In conducting the research we started from the hypothesis that the perception of subjects is different depending on the year of study in which students are enrolled.

The objectives of this study are:

- the identification of questioned subjects perceptions on the effectiveness of license ppi program;
- the identification the perception of the importance of pedagogical skills in the teaching profession;
- the identification of the perception on the importance of teaching practice.

3.2. Participants

The study participants are 140 students from preschool and primary education (license cycle) in all three years of study, which are differentiated by the variables: gender (5% male, 95% female), residence (urban – 42%, rural – 58%), age (45% aged between 20 and 30 years old, 32% aged between 30 and 40 years old, 33% aged between 40

and 50 years old).

3.3. The Methodology of Research

The research data were collected through a survey based on a questionnaire. The tools were developed in accordance with the study objectives and they collect qualitative and quantitative information regarding the variables that determine the training and development of professional skills.

This instrument has three dimensions:

- identification of subjective perceptions on the effectiveness of license PPIP program,
- analyze subjects' perception of the importance of pedagogical skills in teaching profession,
- identification of subjective perceptions on the importance of teaching practice.

4. The Analysis and Interpretation of Results

The processing of measured data allowed the identification of respondents' opinions on the satisfaction on attending the study program PIPP. Differences of opinion targets the subjects perception on the effectiveness of undergraduate program they are enrolled, the final year students expressed a much higher percentage (24%) disagreed with the availability of an employment/ teaching position immediately after graduation compared with the first year students with in a very small percentage (8%) disagrees.

The majority of students appreciated in a very high percentage the importance of pedagogical skills in the teaching profession. They also appreciate the significant role of teaching practice in the initial training programs and also the importance of psycho-pedagogical and the didactic of the specialization in the training model for teaching career. These views are supported by direct responses aimed explicitly the need for longer periods of teaching practice among the conditions of effectiveness in teaching profession. By teaching practice student is preparing for the teaching profession and it ensured his progressive insertion in exercise of their work with a mentor support in the application school that meets all the following roles:

- the role of forming practical professional skills;
- social role of the student practitioner, through familiarity with the school environment, classroom environment, with teachers and with the head of school in question;
- role of control in that it always evaluates student progress and support him when he has difficulties;
- supportive role by guiding and advising the student practitioner;
- learning model role for the student teaching skills training: the student it's an observer, and also works as a team with the mentor for teaching design, teaching and assessment;
- the mentor fulfills the role of learning resource: by the classes assistance and by analyzing the activity of teaching practice, also the mentor provides feedback on the quality of the teaching project design, on the teaching and evaluation behavior of the student, on organizational behavior and control of that class;
- management counseling role of teaching and career development, personal and professional development, for the integration into organizational culture, development capacity, to increase their capacity to establish interpersonal relationships, in mediating conflicts, self development and self-evaluation capacity, etc.
- motivator role, to self-confidence and personal enrichment;
- evaluator role for the teaching benefits of the student.

Measured data identifies several relevant issues regarding the identification of weaknesses of initial training appreciated by students. The problems most often mentioned are related to: communication with students; resolving conflict situations; relations teacher - students - parents; tense situations with colleagues or superiors; teaching design; evaluation methods. To solve such problems, subjects estimated that it would require effective collaboration between mentors and coordinators of university teaching practice, to facilitate student access to concrete reality of educational knowledge. Also, is felt that a greater number of teaching activities models would streamline initial training (study III year students - 86%, year II study - 78.66%, year of study I - 34%).

It is evident the need that students aims to achieve in teaching design in preparing teaching materials, by implication, through guidance, by the explanation and accessibility of curriculum elements, to achieve a greater number of teaching demonstration, providing enough time to practice specific teaching actions and the organization of teaching practice activities in line with new standards of teaching skills development.

Regarding the causes that determine the low number of graduates who choose to work in education, they consist, in the opinion of all students in low wages and lack of intrinsic motivation. In this context, it must be highlighted the common views of students in all three-years of study on the role of representative models in social level, professional development perspectives, issues that were assessed as few were the reduced options for graduate teaching occupations.

The last item of the questionnaire, with open answer, intends to identify solutions to improve the mentor-teachers' activity to the direction of developing teaching competencies; the suggestions coming from the subjects were as follows:

- efficient collaboration between mentors and pedagogical practise coordinators – 42%;
- continuous specialized training, by means of specialty lectures – 28%;
- seriousness and responsibility coming from the students (observation of the programme, of the directions given by the mentors) – 15%;
- new printed materials to support the mentors' training and formation – 6%;
- national exchanges of expertise between mentors – 6%;
- better communication mentor – student – 2%;
- a larger number of model - teaching activities for the students – 1%;

3. Discussion and Conclusion

The research data can't be generalized however we can say, as a general conclusion of the study, that there are significant differences regarding the students perception about the role of school activities in professional skills training, perception determined by the age and the place of residency.

The practical implications of this study relates to providing alternatives for university teachers at preschool and primary education specialization in terms of orientation and integration of students in school activities to facilitate the formation and development of the teaching profession.

The study of teachers activities, of the efficiency of the instructive-educative demarche was a constant concern for the researches in this field. No matter the perspective, the researchers settled on identifying the existence of some factors in order to describe and explain the competence in the didactic activity, factors which one understood could be developed and formed through educational mentoring.

For training and skills development is necessary both theoretical work, information and especially practical work, done in a real professional context.

Initial training programs can not realistically propose than stimulating the teaching skills in their sense of minimum professional standards that should be allowed to raise graduates, but it is necessary to cover as large a variety of skills.

In any education system is not valued exclusively the scientific training, specialized for the teacher, always been mentioned a number of other skills needed to support learning activity and personality training students in various moments of the educational process. Humanistic orientation and student-centered are the main theoretical concepts underlying the development standards of the teaching profession. It also will consider dynamic teaching professions and skills of teachers in terms of professional roles which it conducts social insertion and professional requirements.

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